

*General Lew. Wallace at  
Shiloh: How He was Convinced of  
an Error after Forty Years*

BY

JOSEPH W. RICH



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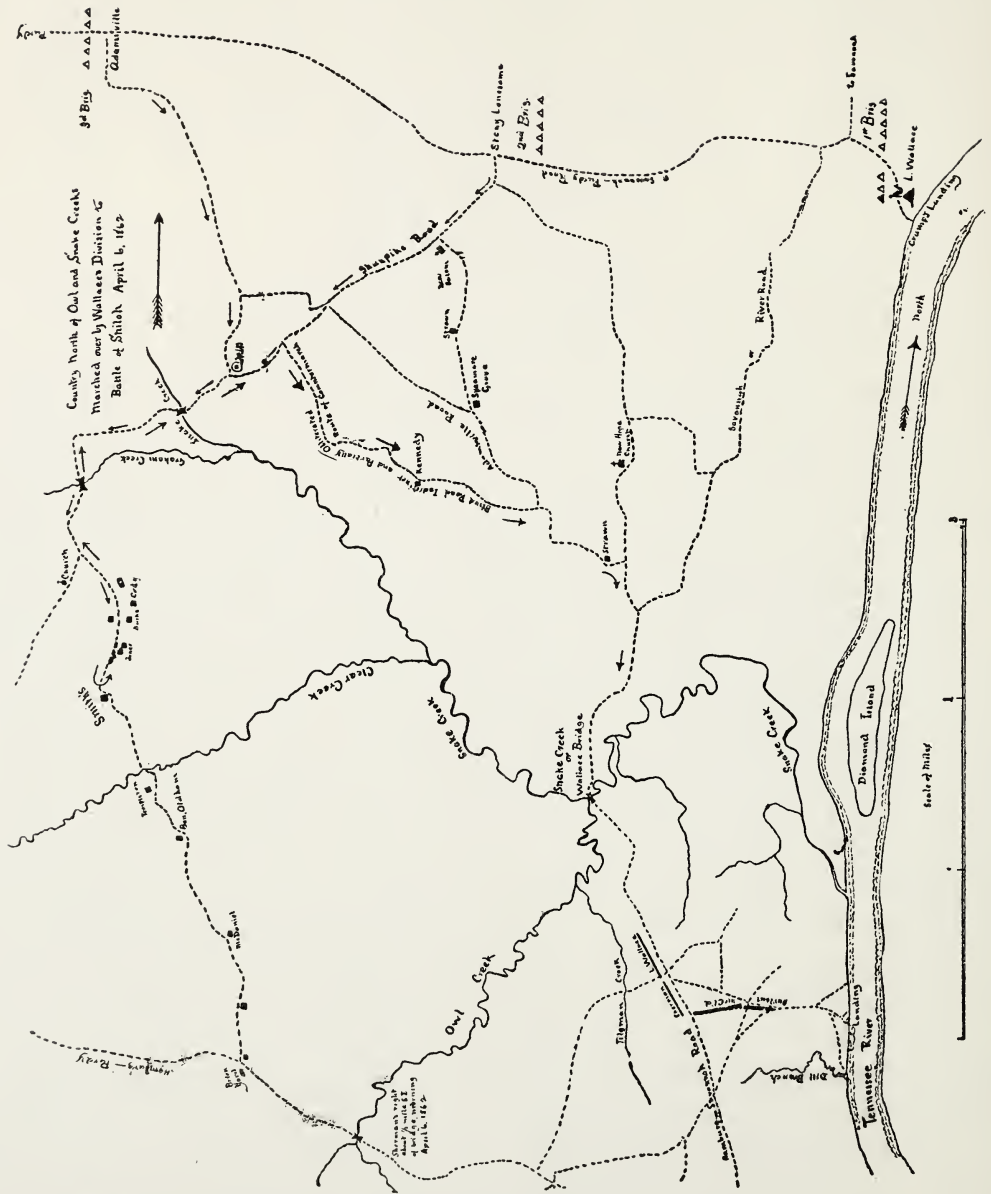


GENERAL LEW. WALLACE AT SHILOH: HOW HE  
WAS CONVINCED OF AN ERROR AFTER  
FORTY YEARS

A very interesting autobiography of General Lew. Wallace appeared in 1906. It was a posthumous publication, General Wallace having died in February, 1905.<sup>1</sup> The sketch of his early life is not only interesting in itself, it is also entertainingly written so that the reader wants to know what is recorded on the next page, and the next, and so on indefinitely. Very naturally the author has given much space to his part in the Civil War, his service beginning within a few hours after the firing on Fort Sumter and continuing to the close. Having had a brief experience in the Mexican War with a lieutenant's commission, the way was open to him for immediate preferment, and he was appointed Adjutant General, by Governor Morton of Indiana, almost before the sound of the first gun had died away. He was in command of a regiment within a few weeks, and commanded a brigade at Fort Donelson, in February, 1862. A few weeks later he commanded the Third Division in the Army of the Tennessee and participated in the battle of Shiloh, April 7, 1862. He received the commission of Major General before the close of his thirty-fifth year and a few days before the battle of Shiloh.

General Wallace's division consisted of three brigades of three regiments each, two batteries of five guns each, and two squadrons of cavalry, and it was a part of the advance in the expedition up the Tennessee under command of General Smith. The division was stationed at Crump's Land-

<sup>1</sup> *Lew Wallace: An Autobiography*. New York: Harper and Brothers. 1906.



MAP SHOWING GENERAL LEW. WALLACE'S MARCH TO THE BATTLE OF SHILOH

ing, six miles below Pittsburg Landing, on the west side of the river. Soon after landing at Crump's, Wallace sent his second brigade west on the Purdy road to Stony Lonesome, and his third brigade to Adamsville, still farther west on the same road and five miles from Crump's Landing, all within easy marching distance of Pittsburg Landing, by the most direct road. Receiving orders from General Grant at 11:30 o'clock to march to the battle field, the march began from Stony Lonesome, according to Wallace, at precisely noon, over the Shunpike road toward the crossing of Owl Creek, near the right of the army as it was at the opening of the battle. The third brigade moved out from Adamsville a little later and joined the column on the march. Unfortunately, Wallace had chosen the longer road to the field. In his autobiography he writes: "The going was swift and without incident. Past the old overshot mill, past Snake Creek, past Clear Creek, and no enemy — not a shot. . . . The last file of the rear-guard had put Clear Creek behind it, and the guard itself was stepping long and fast. One o'clock and thirty minutes by the watch".<sup>2</sup>

About a half hour later — "A few minutes after two o'clock", to quote again — Wallace was overtaken by a third courier. At this point the column was halted and began the counter-march for Pittsburg Landing by the River Road and Wallace's Bridge over Snake Creek. The third brigade from Adamsville fell in behind the second after the counter-march began, according to Wallace himself, so that his rear-guard could not have "put Clear Creek behind it" at "one o'clock and thirty minutes by the watch". It was at least four miles away. The head of the column even had not crossed Clear Creek, which Wallace had mistaken for Owl Creek, which was still four miles ahead, when the counter-march began. So much was Wallace out of correct

<sup>2</sup> *Lew Wallace: An Autobiography*, Vol. I, p. 465.

reckoning. And this is the more strange because, only a few days before, "Somewhere in the last week of March", in company with Major Hayes and his company of cavalry, he had ridden over the entire road from Stony Lonesome to Pittsburg Landing and back.<sup>3</sup>

Evidently General Wallace wrote the account of the march from Stony Lonesome to the field of battle, and of other events connected therewith, long after the events, trusting to memory. Though never doubting the accuracy of his memory, he seems to have thought it worth while to verify his recollections, before the publication of his autobiography, by visiting and going over the grounds where the events occurred so many years before. So, in November, 1901, General Wallace, in company with several friends, visited the Shiloh Field, for the purpose of verifying his recollections and, presumably, for the purpose of correcting errors due to a treacherous memory. The General was convinced of some errors, but he forgot to tell about it in his autobiography.

Major D. W. Reed, then Secretary and Historian of the Shiloh Military Park Commission, in a letter to the writer, gives an account of that visit and describes in detail the careful survey made by the General and his friends, in company with the Secretary-Historian, in passing over every foot of the line of march from Stony Lonesome to Pittsburg Landing, on that Sunday, April 6, 1862. The letter, now for the first time in print, is given in the pages immediately following.

J. W. RICH

THE STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF IOWA  
IOWA CITY IOWA

<sup>3</sup> *Lew Wallace: An Autobiography*, Vol. I, p. 453.

War Department,  
Shiloh National Military Park Commission,  
Pittsburg Landing, Tenn.

February 13, 1909

*My Dear Comrade Rich:*

Answering yours of 9th instant just received. You evidently quote from General Lew. Wallace's Autobiography: "The last file of the rear-guard had put Clear Creek behind it at 1:30 p. m."

There are discrepancies in the records concerning this march of the command of General Wallace that cannot be explained or reconciled except on the theory that memory of events of long ago is not always reliable. General Wallace's account of this march shows that his memory of the events of the march has been refreshed or revived since he wrote his official report dated April 12, 1862, Vol. X, pages 169-177.<sup>4</sup> His map, accompanying that report, makes no note of bridges across Snake Creek at the Over-shot Mill, but indicates that his division was marching towards the bridge at the mouth of *Owl Creek* (now known as Wallace Bridge) when he was turned back to a road and bridge of which he had no knowledge and which he describes as at *mouth* of Snake Creek. Rowley, page 180, makes Wallace say: "None of us know the River Road of which you speak". There never was a bridge near the mouth of Snake Creek as indicated on the Wallace map marked "D". The map further shows that General Wallace thought, when he made his report, that he turned back before he reached *Snake Creek*, not after he crossed Clear Creek. The McPherson map, page 183, is a correct map of the country and shows McPherson's idea of the place where he found General Wallace's command.

In November, 1901, General Wallace came here for the purpose of taking notes to verify his autobiography statements as to the Battle of Shiloh. Accompanying him was Captain Brown, of Thompson's Battery, Captain Wood, 11th Indiana, Captain Ensley, 44th Indiana and several others. General Wallace had with him a map which he had prepared for his autobiography, which showed his head of column at the *Owl Creek Bridge* where Sherman's right line rested Sunday morning. He asked to have a marker placed there to show that fact. I said to him: "We cannot do that, General, because it is not true that your advance reached that point

<sup>4</sup> *War of the Rebellion: Official Records*, Series I, Vol. X, Part I, pp. 169-177.

on Sunday.” “Your cavalry did not get within four miles of that place.”

The General was aroused at once and felt like arguing the point, but was told that it was useless to argue the matter; that the best way was to go together to the other end of the route and follow the trail and see if we could not find the place where the column was turned back. To this he readily agreed.

The next day, November 20, 1901, a party consisting of, as shown by our record: “General Wallace, Major Reed, Captain Brown, Captain Wood, Captain Ensley, Mr. Thompson and Mr. Large” visited the camps of Wallace’s division at Crumps, Stony Lonesome and Adamsville and then followed the trail of the division as it marched towards the battlefield April 6, 1862.

It was agreed that on that march the Cavalry, under Major Hayes, was the advance guard followed by Smith’s 1st Brigade in the following order: 24th Indiana, Thompson’s Battery, 11th Indiana, 8th Missouri and then Thayer’s (2nd) Brigade. I note that in autobiography, page 465, it is stated that Thayer’s brigade followed the 24th Indiana. This is undoubtedly an error, for on page 471 it is stated that the first brigade was in advance: “Colonel Smith led them”. In another place the reason for the countermarch, instead of about facing the column, was that the first brigade might be in front.<sup>5</sup> McPherson, page 182, Vol. X, says that the 1st brigade was in front.<sup>6</sup> In any event, they all agreed that Capt. Brown, in command of Thompson’s Battery, [and] Captain Wood were near the head of the column and were to show the road. When the party arrived at the top of the ridge, overlooking the valley of Clear Creek, Captain Brown said: “This is the place where my battery turned around”. After some study they all agreed that the Cavalry was nearly or quite down to the creek but that the Infantry and Artillery countermarched from the ridge before entering the valley. The point from which the column turned back is marked “Smith” on the map of General Wallace’s march. I think you have a copy of that map. In any event the place is about half a mile north of Clear Creek and about two miles from the Overshot mill. The two brigades and two batteries must have occupied the road all the way from “Smith” back to the Overshot mill,

<sup>5</sup> *Lew Wallace: An Autobiography*, Vol. I, pp. 465, 471; see also p. 469, footnote.

<sup>6</sup> *War of the Rebellion: Official Records*, Series I, Vol. X, Part I, p. 182.

for, members of the 3rd brigade, leaving Adamsville at 2 p. m.,—Whittlesey's report—say that they came up to the rear of Thayer's brigade at the mill and waited there an hour or more for the first and second brigades to countermarch and string out on the direct road to Pittsburg Landing. General Wallace says: "While making this change of direction, the 3rd brigade came up and took its place."

After locating the point, "Smith", as the place from which he turned back, General Wallace said: "Now Major, you will give it up that my Cavalry was down there at Owl Creek, won't you?" My reply was: "I admit that your Cavalry was doubtless at the creek in our front, but that is not Owl but Clear Creek, four miles this side of Owl". The General could not be convinced that his cavalry had not reached Owl Creek, until we had continued the journey all the way to that crossing, and had interviewed several citizens along the way, among them Captain T. A. Johnson, C. S. A., who when asked if he knew where General Wallace's command turned back, when on its march to the battle field, April 6, 1862, replied: "Yes I know about that. I was in command of a Cavalry company detailed to watch General Wallace's movements. I was at Clear Creek and saw the head of column turn back, the cavalry following as rear guard. As soon as I was sure that all had gone back, I reported the fact to the Infantry force that was guarding Owl Creek bridge and it was relieved and sent to the front". After a second interview with Captain Johnson, lasting all the next forenoon, General Wallace was convinced and said: "Major Hayes surely reported to me that he reached Owl Creek bridge. I see now that his report was wrong and that I have been wrong for nearly forty years. I will see that the error is corrected in my forthcoming autobiography." In making such correction, he has evidently put Clear Creek at the wrong end of his column. The head did possibly reach that creek but his rear guard was at that time back at Adamsville and did not cross *Snake Creek* until after dark, and then at the lower crossing.

I note that the General suggests, in autobiography, that at the time he was turned back, he had it in mind that it would be a good plan to continue the march and attack the Confederates in the rear. This seems to be an afterthought inconsistent with his official report, pages 170 and 175, Vol. X, in which he says if the march had

been continued my army would have been entirely cut off and be liable to be cut to pieces.<sup>7</sup>

While at Shiloh, in 1901, General Wallace suggested that if he had known the exact conditions of the Confederate forces it might have been a good plan to have continued his march and attacked the enemy in the rear. But when he came to the swamp, absolutely impassable, except over a narrow corduroy road nearly half a mile long, had it pointed out to him that this road was defended by two full regiments and a battery of artillery, he admitted that it would have been impossible for his division to have forced the crossing.

I note another curiosity in the autobiography. Nowhere in any of the reports is there any mention of a name for the bridge over Snake Creek, other than Snake Creek Bridge. No one, during War times seems to have heard of it by any other name. When General Wallace was here in 1901, Mr. Thompson said to him: "We have good authority for calling this 'Wallace Bridge'. It was first so named before the war because a man named Wallace lived near it. It was again so christened when W. H. L. Wallace rebuilt it just before the battle, and again christened when General Lew. Wallace crossed it on his way to the field."

The General several times referred to the matter as a coincident that he was glad to hear about, his expressions indicating that he had never before heard that the bridge was called Wallace. He now, in his book, recites that General Smith in giving him his orders gave particular instructions about "Wallace Bridge" and refers to it frequently as of his knowledge in 1862.

This is interesting in one way, as it shows that this part of the autobiography was written, or at least modified after his visit here in 1901.

I am sure this more than answers your questions and is doubtless uninteresting but as I was looking up my notes and found that I had never put the record of the General's visit in writing, I thought it [would] be of use sometime to have it. I keep copy.

Very truly yours,

D. W. REED

<sup>7</sup> *War of the Rebellion: Official Records*, Series I, Vol. X, Part I, pp. 170, 175.



